



OCASI Conference October 18, 2007

# Creating a Bridge: A Snapshot of ESL Literacy in Ontario 2006

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# Acknowledgements

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gratefully acknowledges the  
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# Research Purpose

This two-year project examines the literacy issues and challenges faced by adult immigrant Canadians, newcomer or settled, living in Ontario, whose first language is not English or French and who have limited literacy skills in their first language.

# Who Is Involved in this Research

- **Ontario Literacy Coalition:** a provincial organization literacy organization that has been supporting all levels of literacy in Ontario since 1986.
- **Upper Canada Leger Centre for Education & Training:** (researchers)
- **12 member Advisory Committee**
- **External Evaluators**

# Research Methodology

- Literature Review
- Environmental Scan
- Key Informant Interviews
- On-line Discussion Forums

# Research Questions

- **Questions about the Target Audience**
  - What are the target audience's demographics?
  - What are the target audience's first language literacy/*ESL literacy* **needs, issues, and/or challenges**?
- **Questions about Services**
  - What are the current first language literacy/*ESL literacy* **services** available to immigrants?
  - How accessible are services and how do immigrants **access** them?
- **Program Delivery and Practitioners**
  - Who are the **people** that provide first language instruction/*ESL Literacy* in Ontario?
  - What are **best practices** in program delivery here and abroad?
  - What are the **training needs** of first language literacy/*ESL literacy* practitioners?
- **Questions about Policy**
  - What are the relationships between policy and effective second language (L2) literacy learning?

# Terminology

- **ESL:** English as a Second Language and all other usages
- **Adult ESL Program:** Refers to English as a Second Language program of instruction for adults usually 16 years and older. Also used to refer to all relevant programming, including Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)
- **L1:** First or source language, mother tongue
- **L2:** Second language, learned after L1
- **Instructor:** Facilitator or teacher of the adult ESL class
- **Practitioner:** may be an ESL instructor, but also includes people who are working in an ESL program including manager, administrators, researchers, tutors etc.

# **Literature Review**

**English as a second language  
acquisition and literacy**

# ESL Literacy Field is Complex

- Two huge knowledge lacks: a second language and literate knowledge / expertise.
- Social identity
- Effects of first language (L1)
- Unequal power relations
- Education experience or lack of experience
- Culture shock, confidence
- Practitioner knowledge and beliefs

# Current Issues in ESL Literacy Literature

- Lack of literacy theory in use/at work in the field
- Relative unknowns of ESL literacy as distinct and compared to general ESL delivery

# First Language Literacy

- There is some evidence and many voices insisting that L1 literacy must be established before L2 literacy can effectively occur.
- Lack of comparison groups in studies.
- Most follow subjects who acquire literacy in the L1 and then are able to transfer knowledge to literacy learning in L2.

# Settlement Issues

- Housing (reading classifieds, signing a lease),
- Safety (understanding smoke alarms, no smoking, 911),
- Employment (low paying, non-communication),
- Transportation (bus stop, reading signs),
- Social services and health interactions (lack of plain language, dominant attitude that everyone reads),
- Child-rearing (cannot help with homework, communicate with school),
- Lack of literacy level ESL classes

# Other Impacts

- Culture shock and homesickness
- Parenting - A lack of familiarity with schooling, having a child who becomes the source for L2 knowledge
- Stigma of lack of literacy in western society with a dominant mainstream written language system.
- ESL literacy learners recovering from trauma

# **ESL Literacy Learners' Characteristics**

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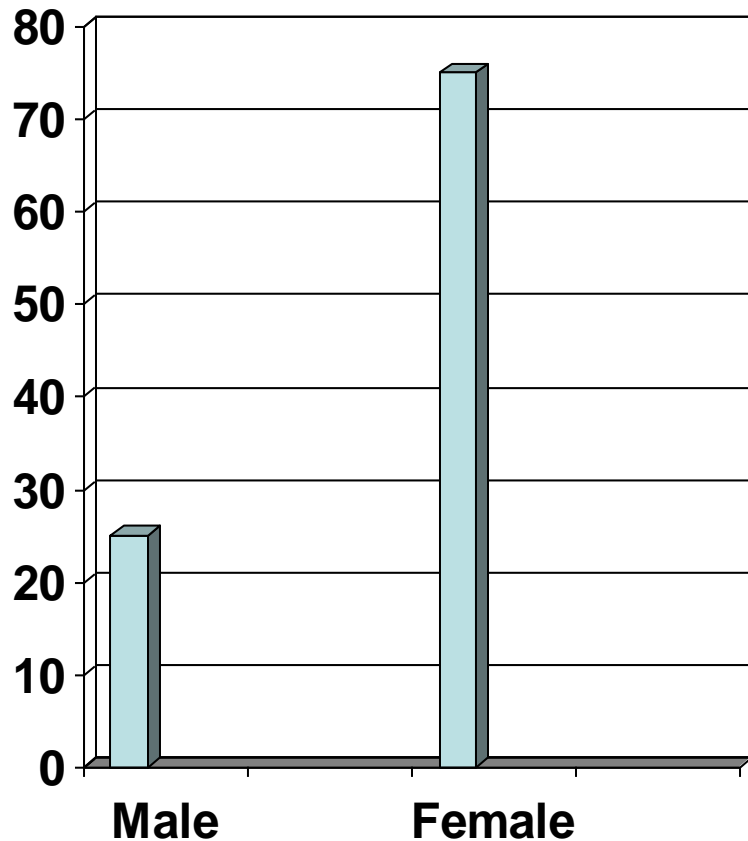
# Characteristics

- We know very little about immigrants coming to Canada and their level of proficiency in their first language. We have literacy performance statistical results for immigrants in general; however there is no specific data collected to measure learner literacy levels in their first language.
- What we **do** know is that, when assessed for proficiency in English, immigrants for whom English is a relatively new language, do not read as well as the Canadian born population.
- What we **do not** know is how well they could read in their first language before they arrived in Canada. This data is not collected by either the provincial or federal government.

# ESL Literacy Learner Characteristics (cont.)

- In general many ESL literacy learners, prior to arriving to Canada have had to deal with traumatic experiences that impact their lives.
- In order to address their particular needs, instruction needs to be delivered in a way that is respectful of those experiences and which specialized skills are required.
- ESL literacy programs fulfill more than language needs: they are a support system which is an asset to further their progress.

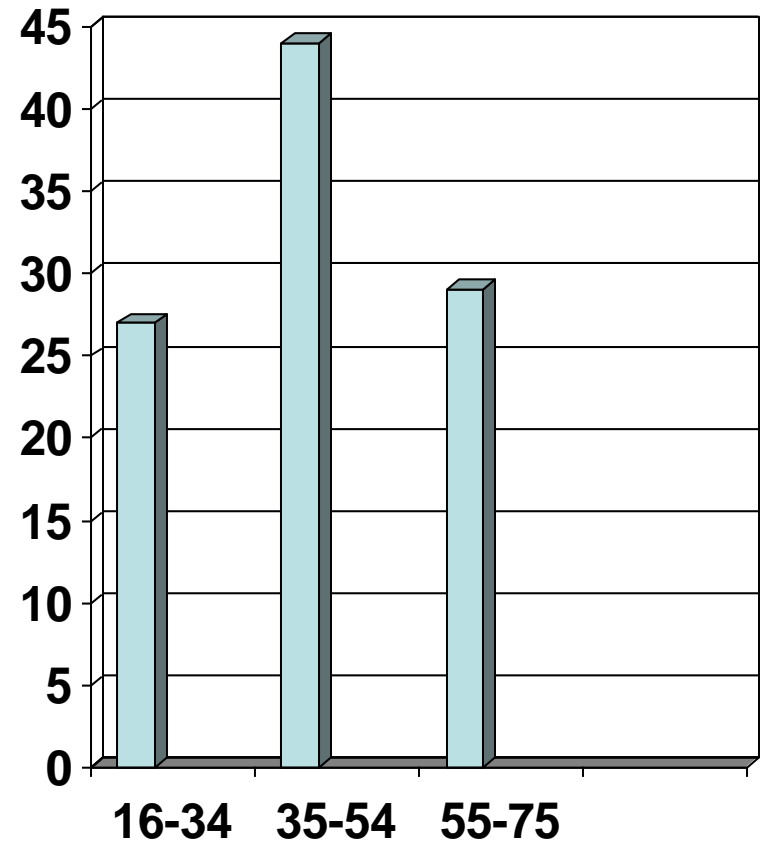
# Learners: Gender



- Instructor survey respondents indicated that just over 25% of students are male while just under 75% of students are female

# Learners: Age

- Just over 27% of learners are between the ages of 16 – 34
- Just under 44% are between the ages of 35 – 54
- Almost 29% are between the ages of 55 – 74



# Distribution of Proficiency Levels, by Immigrant Status, Canada, Population aged 16-65, 2003

	<i>Level 1</i>	<i>Level 2</i>	<i>Level 3</i>	<i>Level 4/5</i>
	%	%	%	%
<b><i>PROSE</i></b>				
Canadian Born	<b><i>10.1</i></b>	27.1	41.1	21.7
Recent Immigrants (< = 10 years)	<b><i>30.5</i></b>	29.3	32.1	8.1
Established Immigrants (> = 10 years)	<b><i>32.6</i></b>	27.6	28.0	11.7
<b><i>NUMERACY</i></b>				
Canadian Born	<b><i>15.8</i></b>	30.6	35.4	18.2
Recent Immigrants (< = 10 years)	<b><i>30.4</i></b>	29.7	27.7	12.2
Established Immigrants (> = 10 years)	<b><i>34.9</i></b>	28.9	24.6	11.6

# Learners: Other Characteristics

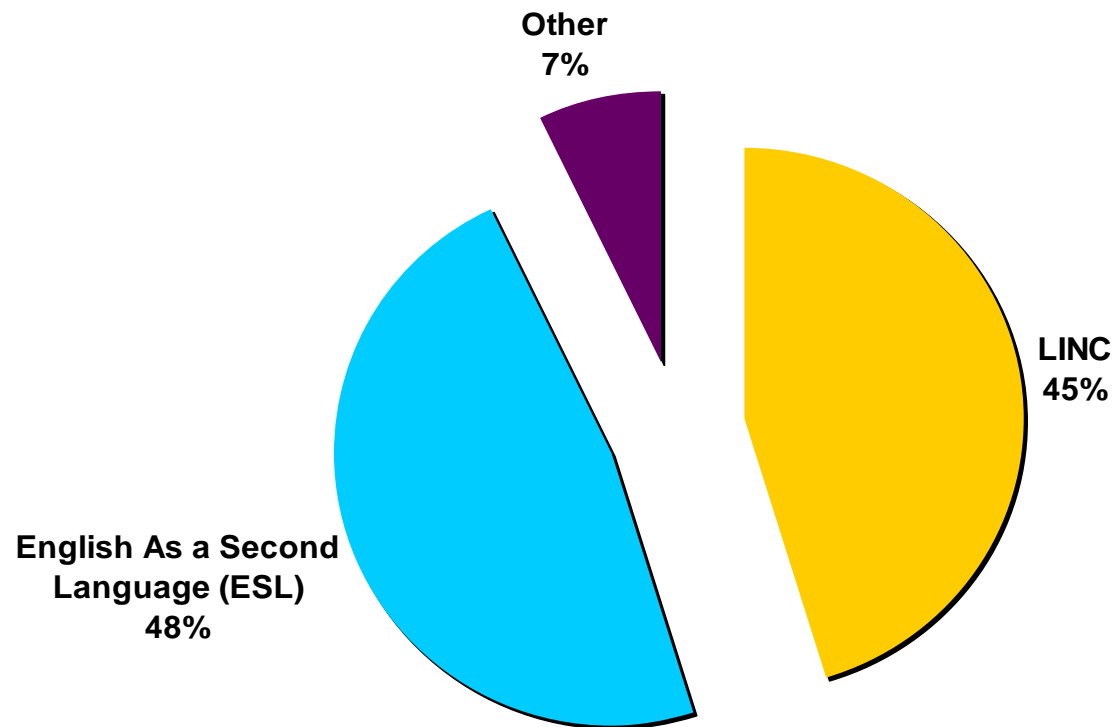
- Physical Characteristics
  - Older Learners
  - Poorer eyesight
- Social Outing
  - Opportunity to socialize
  - Break from isolation
- Victims of Torture
  - Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome
  - Suffering from depression
- Other Experience
  - Difficulty concentrating for longer periods
  - Little or no previous classroom experience

# Program Delivery and Services

# Barriers

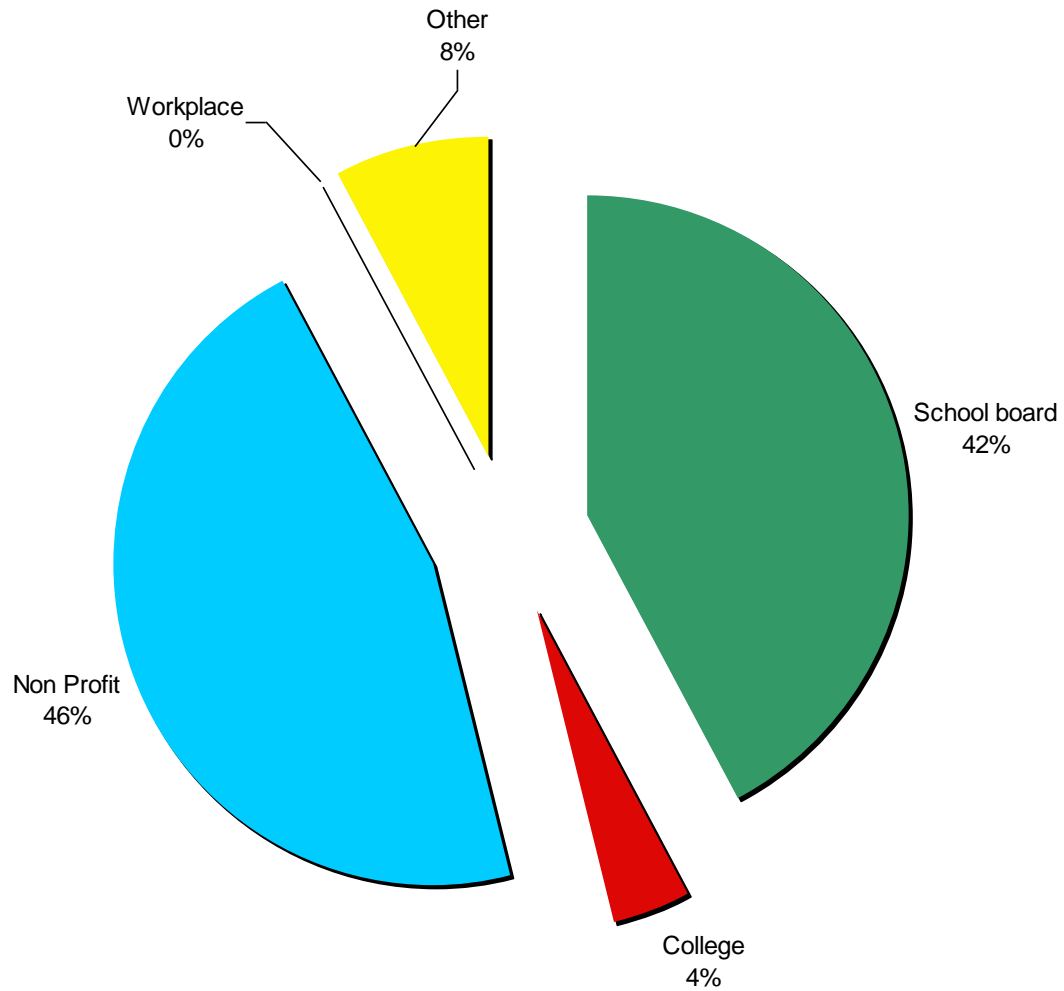
- Respondents noted a lack of day care, lack of counseling services, and depression among major hurdles
  - “ESL literacy students are refugees, come from war-torn countries...”
- ESL literacy students are often in a very fragile state to face learning. Respondents agreed that:
  - “They need to feel confident, go through a lot, a new land, housing, very embarrassed about situation that they can’t read and write. Recognize inadequacies...makes it more exaggerated in their eyes. Sometimes, will cry because (they are) embarrassed. People around them are learning and they are having problems.”

**Type of Programs**



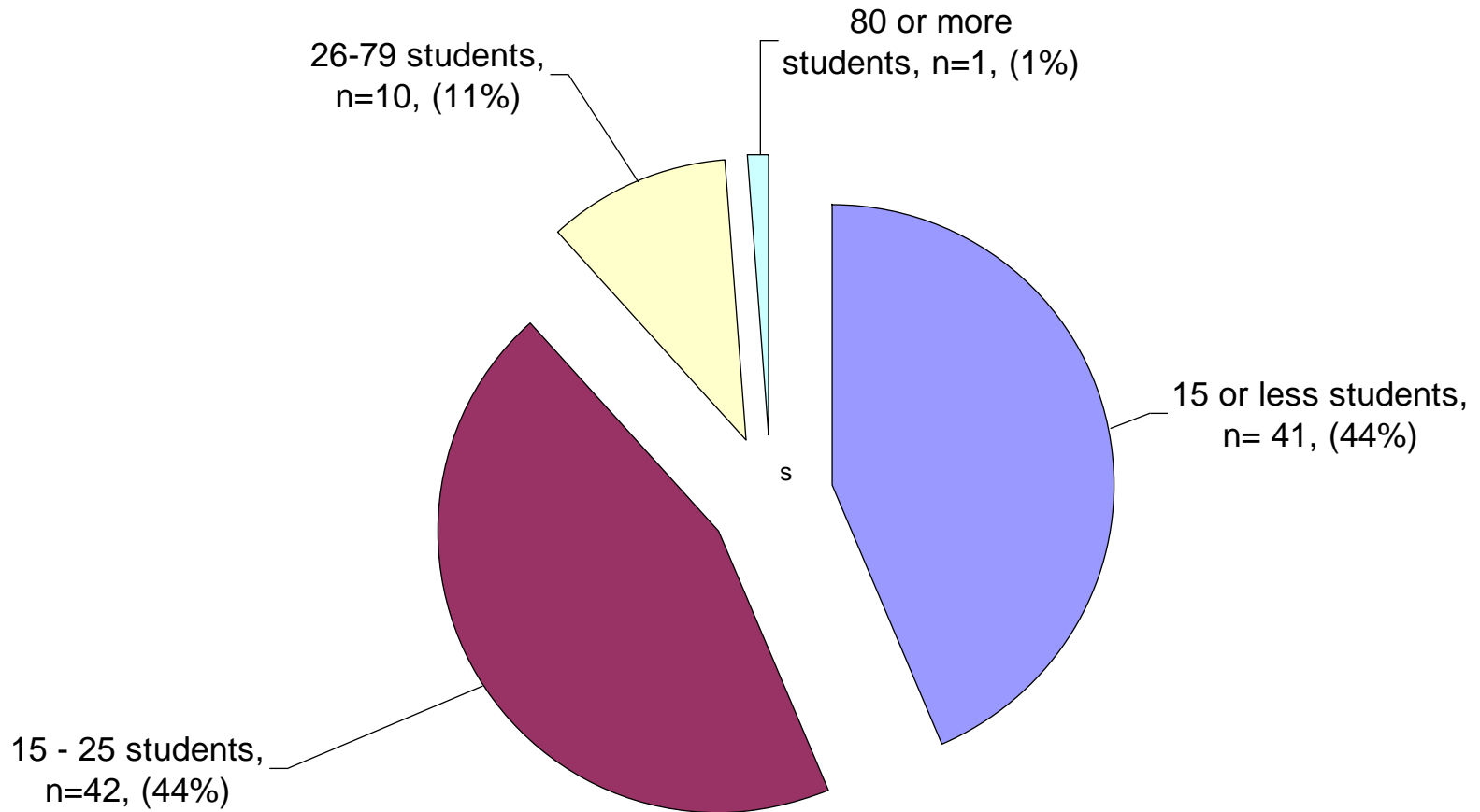
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## Type of ESL Literacy Agency Available



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## Number of Students in Class



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# Practitioners and Instructors

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# Instructor Characteristics

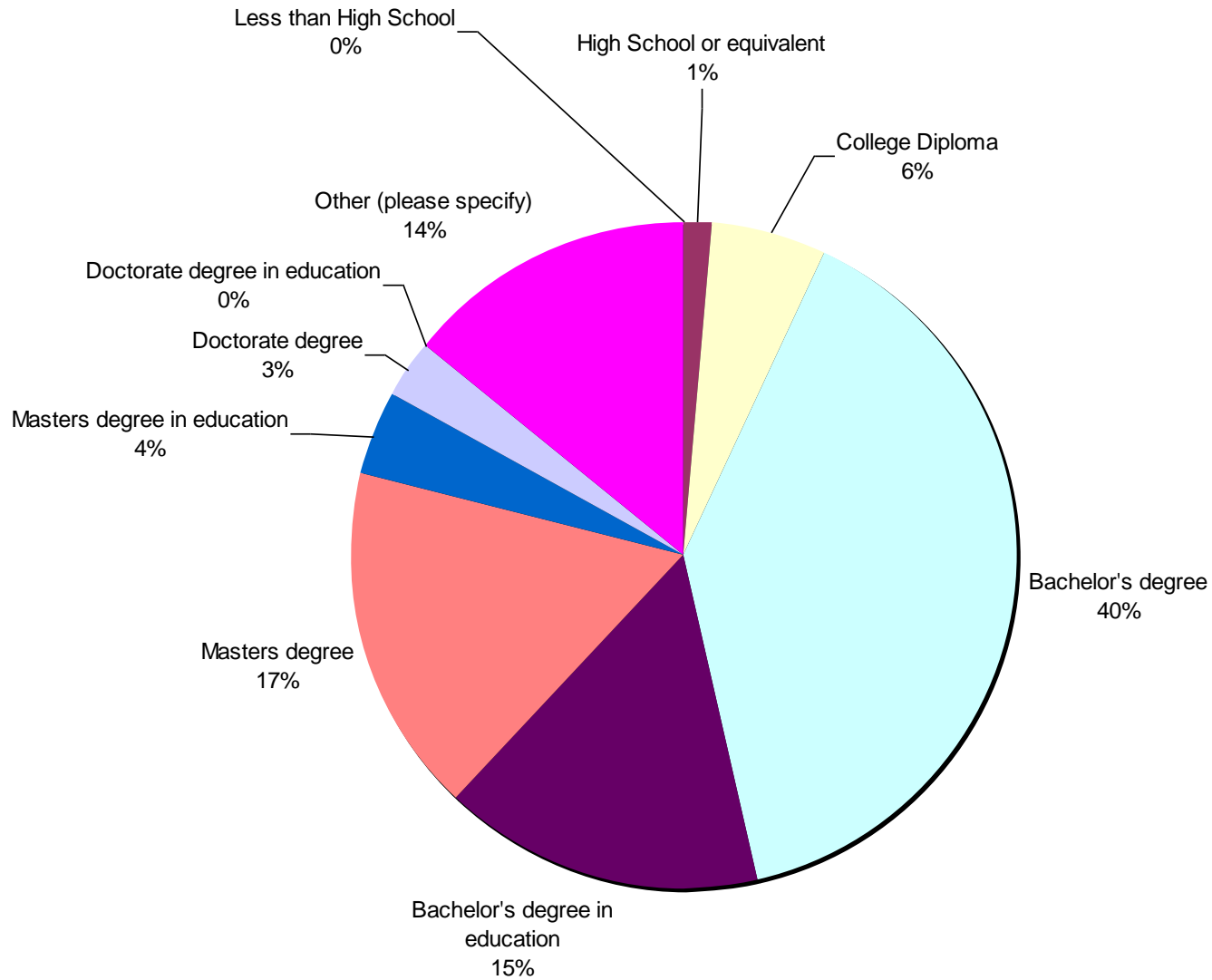
ESL literacy instructors are a group of passionate individuals working with learners. A snapshot of their characteristics reveals that:

- 87 % are female instructors;
- 73% are 45 years of age or older;
- 79% had some type of university degree;
- 96% had some type of ESL certificate complementing their post secondary education;
- The majority teach their ESL literacy students three hours or less per day.

# Sought After Qualifications

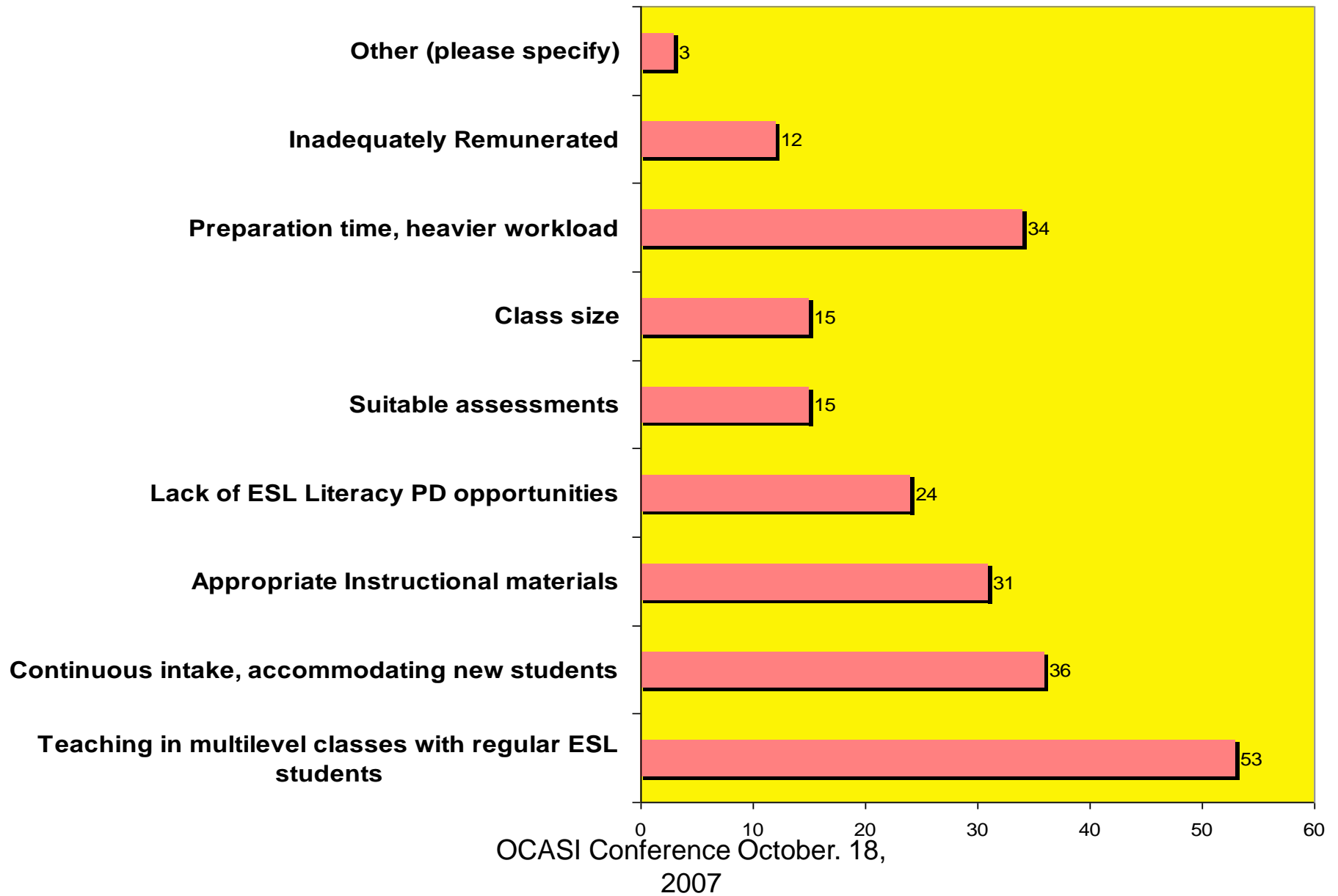
- Come from a background in teaching at the elementary level
- Possess an undergraduate or graduate degree in education
- Have some special education training
- Able to create a warm, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom
- Good at resolving student problems

### Educational Level of Instructors



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### Instructors' Greatest Challenges



# Outreach and Support

“Now this is a particularly good school. The students come here because they get a lot of support from all of the staff members. (They) like the school because of the non-educational services that are offered (which are) just as important to them.”

# Why Linkages

- Using other programs within the community was cited as an asset in furthering learner progress
- Students learn about their community and the community becomes aware of the students presence
- Better opportunity for students to feel more welcome in their classrooms

# Supports

- Students come to appreciate the non-instructional supports they receive from their instructors
- Students cope with a variety of problems such as paying bills, rent, dealing with sick children and finding doctors.
- Instructors provide invaluable assistance to students in a variety of ways, by placing calls to doctors or settlement agencies

# **Policy Considerations / Future Directions**

# Addressing the Knowledge Gap

- Few longitudinal studies
- Lack of distinct focus on ESL literacy learners
- A clear indicator of amount of previous schooling is needed to inform assessors
- Definitive research on “first language first”

# Addressing the Current Funding Structure

- Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (MCI)
  - Annual contracts structure
  - Unstable program infrastructure
  - Disproportionate number of part-time jobs

# Newcomer Language-Training

- Developing a clear and specific ESL Literacy Policy.
  - Policy related to immigrant language training is engaged within the human capital theme
  - Focused on development of the labour market, the labour force, potential lack of workers

# Program Design

- Reduction of class sizes
- Professional Development within the ESL Literacy field
- Reducing pressure of dealing with multiple level classes
- Pacing of instruction
  - Consulting students on appropriate class length and frequency

**For more information on this research, please contact**

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